CHAPTER III

THE SECOND WORLD WAR: A THEMATIC STUDY
THE NAKED AND THE DEAD: NORMAN MAILER

The war novel, generally speaking, is more important as an historical phenomenon than as an artistic achievement. The variety of ways in which writers respond to war — their pervasive sense of nihilism, their desperate affirmation, their withdrawal from society and politics — tell us a great deal about the culture of the time. But since the intrinsic literary merit of the novel of the second war is not great, since the books that came directly out of the war did not herald a renaissance in American letters comparable to the flowering of the twenties, unfavourable judgements have rained down on the entire decade. The judgements, the product of unjustifiable expectations, stand in need of revision. One must see the war novel of the second war, as a product of its own time with its own historical context and cultural tensions to cope with.

John Dos Passos, the originator of both the tone and form of so much of American war literature of the twentieth century surveyed the attitudes of the American fighting man in the forties and found him quite different from his earlier counterpart. For his generation World War I had seemed a horrible interruption in man’s march towards a better life. The next generation was more disenchanted.

The boys who are fighting these present wars got their first ideas of the world during the depression years. From the time they first read their newspapers they drank in the brutalities of European politics with their breakfast coffee. War and oppression in the early years of this century appeared to be like stinking slums in a city that was otherwise beautiful and good to live in, blemishes that skill and courage would remove. To the young men of today these things are inherent deformities of mankind. If you have a clubfoot you learn to live with your clubfoot. That doesn’t mean that
they like the dust and the mud and the fatigue and the agony of war or the oppression of man by man any better than we did. But the idea of these things are more familiar.\(^1\)

Consequently, it is not surprising that the American people engaged in World War II in a spirit of glum resignation; for the most part they saw it as a task that had to be accomplished in order that they might return to their civilian lives as quickly as possible. If the attitude of the American soldier in World War I was informed with a classic American attribute of idealism, that of the World War II soldier was marked chiefly by the other familiar American characteristics of pragmatism and realism. Yet the relative equanimity with which the American citizen faced the prospect of combat in 1941, and the almost total absence of emotional trauma in fiction about the war, do not seem to have derived to any great extent from the experience of World War I. Most of the generation that provided the soldiers for World War II had been born after 1918; although they had perhaps read the works of Hemingway, Cummings, and Dos Passos, the first war for them was a vicarious experience. Malcolm Cowley has observed that the “Americans in World War II were tougher and more sophisticated than their fathers in 1918”,\(^2\) but the emotional toughness with which they were endowed seems to have been a product of the social and economic difficulties experienced by the nation as a whole in the thirties.

In the works of Norman Mailer, James Jones and Irwin Shaw and many other novelists of the Second World War one sees the recurrent image of the young man who graduated from high school and college, and finding no opportunity for a career drifted from one casual job to another as the years went by. To this generation, the

\(^1\) Dos Passos, John – *First Encounter* (New York, 1945) Page 7-8

harsh experience of the depression seems to have permanently blunted the traditional American sense of idealism. As far as they were concerned, if the nation was in an economic cul-de-sac, then it was necessary to pass out through the bottleneck – even if it meant military service – in order to regain personal economic freedom and the opportunity to live a normal life. This assessment of the situation was reflected in the less emotional response to the war by the population as a whole.

For the literature of the war the principal effects derived from the fact that the United States participated much more fully in World War II than it had in World War I. The war, especially in the Pacific, brought home to the American people a unique experience as a great power whose attitudes were influenced very little by those of the allied countries. “The Pacific campaign changed all that for the American novelist. This war was really theirs ... Looking back on the Pacific, the Americans ...... built up a thorough and realistic war literature from the foundations, to make the genre their own, as if it had never existed before.”

One sees this new aspect of the American outlook reflected in the soldiers attitude toward friend and foe. Malcolm Cowley now observes that in World War II “the soldiers made little distinction among the occupied, the liberated and the allied countries, since the people in all of them were foreigners – that is frogs, limeys, heinies, ginzos, yellow bastards, wops, flips or gooks.” The responsibility for carrying the burden of the war turned the American point of view inward; the more realistic concept of war with which the nation entered the conflict and the longer

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3 Pritchett, V.S. – “American Soldiers” in New Statesman, LXV, Page 207
exposure to combat provided the opportunity for a set of fully developed attitudes to ripen and be recorded. These attitudes remained fairly consistent in many of the novels written from 1945 to 1956. Thus although in the novels of World War II there is no chronological movement from idealism to despair as there had been in the literature of World War I, there does emerge a series of portraits — of the civilian soldier, the professional officer, the Jew — reflecting typically American responses to warfare and the military establishment.

American war novelists in general tend to be bards of the enlisted man, sensitive to his woes and glories. The characteristic shared by the protagonists of the World War II novels is a total lack of the crusading spirit. Where their World War I counterpart joined up to fight the Hun or to engage in an exciting adventure, they joined for purely practical or selfish reasons. In most cases they knew that the draft was hanging over them in any event and that by volunteering they could either alleviate the tension of waiting or seek some special status denied to the draftees. In some cases like that of Red Valsen in The Naked and the Dead, the individual joined up because the army offered him employment after years of drifting. The business of enlisting is usually treated soberly and with a minimum of flag waving. In the majority of the characters, however, the war came as an onerous obligation enforced by the threat of the draft. For most of these men, wartime service was only another bump on the long road of misfortune their generation had already travelled.

If the fictional World War II hero enlisted as a matter of necessity rather than for humanitarian or patriotic reasons, his objectives in the war were equally practical. In a White House speech in 1942, President Roosevelt had said that as a result of this war “he believed that a peace could be established and guaranteed for at least twenty
five years, or as any of his, and Churchill’s and Stalin’s generations could expect to
live". In other words this was not a war to end war or to introduce the millenium but
to achieve the fairly realistic goal of immediate peace. This objective, or variations of
it, is what the Second World War novelists suggest was the typical goal the American
pursued in World War II. The peace they sought was a peace in which they would
have the opportunity for personal economic development rather than the culmination
of a victorious crusade. In The Naked and the Dead, Gallagher wants to get back to
his career as small time politician, and Goldstein dreams of setting up a welding shop
in the Bronx. If, in joining the armed forces, many characters are shown as following
a path they hope, will eventually bring them the opportunity for economic
advancement in civilian life, others seek the same objective in a military career. Major
Dalleson, Gen. Cummings’ operations officer in The Naked and the Dead is forced by
his dream of a captaincy in the peace time army to reluctantly take the initiative when
he finds himself in the uncomfortable position of directing a battle during the
general’s absence. Dalleson is a professional soldier in the sense that he has chosen a
career in the armed forces for the sake of the military life itself. He is a professional
soldier only in the sense that he intends to spend his life in the service.

In addition to the search for economic welfare, either in the armed forces or as
a result of the advent of peace, an author occasionally suggests that one of his
characters has joined up as a gesture in his search for social equality. To Sgt. Julio
Martinez in The Naked and the Dead, the army offers an escape from the stigma of
his Mexican origin. After a youth filled with humiliation as a counter boy and farm

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2 Aichinger, Peter – The American Soldier in Fiction (Iowa, 1975) Page 156
hand, a sergeantcy in the United States army offers a social status he could never attain by any other means. To relinquish it by leaving the army would mean returning to the status of a servant or wetback labourer. "Little Mexican boys also breathe the American fables. If they cannot be aviators or financiers or officers they can still be heroes." This thought drives him forward even when he is in the grip of convulsive fear.

Finally the World War II novelists depict the individual who goes to war in search of experience. This sense of excitement and adventure was a common characteristic among the fictional heroes of World War I, but their World War II counterparts were a good deal more sophisticated. In 1917, the American youth was hungry for adventure as a relief from the daily drudge – Europe, was the unknown continent offering strange and illicit delights. Hemingway’s Lt. Henry found a stimulation in Europe not greatly different in quality from that experienced by the average tourist. Mailer’s Lt. Hearn, on the other hand, joins the army in search of data that will confirm his rather dismal view of human nature. "The only thing that interested him vitally was to uncover the least concealed quirks of any man or woman who diverted him...... ‘When I find the shoddy motive in them I’m bored’ ". He has already been abroad – foreign travel offers him no excitement. Like most thinking men of the World War II fiction he seeks experience in the military service on a more philosophical level. The army brings together disparate individuals who would not normally associate with each other and forces them to interact under stress. It is this interaction that Hearn seeks to observe. This desire for an introverted yet collective

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6 Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead (New York, 1948) Page 59
7 Ibid, Page 69
quality of experience is far removed from the purposes attributed to the First World War soldier. The later fiction hopes to find the significance of the war within the confines of American society, as it is represented in the armed forces rather than in external contacts between foreigners and themselves. The soldiers in the works of Hemingway, Cummings and Dos Passos see the war in terms of its impact on themselves as individuals. In the novels of the Second War, on the other hand, the experience of the war is understood in terms of its impact on American society as a whole. By the 1940s, the American people at least as they are portrayed in their literature had overcome the Jamesian naivety that had led them to seek fulfillment in the Old World. By this time they are no longer overawed by the European presence but concerned about problems regarding their own security.

The appeal to the team spirit is perhaps the only positive motivation mentioned in the novels of World War II. Recognising the pitfalls of an exaggerated propaganda campaign, the new emotional toughness of the American soldier, and the greater access to factual information, the trend from 1941 to 1945 was a tendency to avoid any overt appeal to the emotions of the draftee. The negative motivation was the realisation that victory was the only way out of the army. Brought within fighting distance of the enemy, they saw well enough that until those people over there were all killed or frightened into quitting, they would never get home. The experience of combat itself unexpectedly served to transform the draftee into a better-motivated and more competent soldier.

This evolution from resentment to involvement may have been the result of an ultimately selfish pragmatism, but it created a deeper comradeship and loyalty than that described in the World War I novels. John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* and
Thomas Boyd’s *Through the Wheat* both describe starry eyed soldiers venturing out to save civilisation yet ending up disillusioned and alienated from society as well as from their fellow soldiers. This theme of isolation of course finds a fuller expression in Lt. Henry’s loneliness at the end of *A Farewell to Arms*. On the other hand, the fictional World War II soldier enters the war with cynicism but becomes welded into the team spirit of the war by the experience of it. More important there is no suggestion of the pessimism and despair common to World War I characters. Instead there is a sense of solidarity and mutual confidence deriving from the reliance of the members of the team upon each other. A fine illustration of this is Wilson’s rescue by his comrades in *The Naked and the Dead*, given the circumstances a near impossible feat. The avoidance of emotional propaganda, and the effect of the soldier’s first taste of combat are shown as having a positive effect on the attitude of the draftee toward the unit in which he serves, even while his knowledge of war and his revulsion against it deepens.

For the professional soldier like Sgt. Croft (*The Naked and the Dead*) the war is the culmination of his career, but for the great majority of characters in American fiction, the war is seen in contrast to the individual’s past life. The standard thematic device of the World War II novelist is to project the soldier’s life against the backdrop of war. In the World War I novels the reader knows nothing about the background experience of the characters. Only the sketchiest information is provided about where Frederick Henry or Andrews came from or what their previous experiences had been. They are treated not so much as individuals as composite expressions of the national will. Their stories begin from the time when they volunteer, in keeping usually with the overpowering American mood of idealism, and their reaction to the war is seen
not so much as the product of their backgrounds as of the war itself. In the World War II novels on the other hand, the war is a backdrop rather than a medium; it provides the screen on which are projected some further episodes in an already fairly complete history of the individuals life. In *The Naked and the Dead*, *From Here to Eternity* and *The Young Lions*, each author devotes a large part of the book to those events in the soldier’s previous environment that influences his conduct in the armed forces.

Aside from establishing the fact that the enlisted man is essentially a civilian at heart whose prime desire is to get out of the army this introduction of background material and shift in the relationship between the soldier and the battle is fundamental to the novelist’s changing perception of the place of war in society. In the first world war, America’s first real blood letting against an external enemy, it was important and in fact sufficient to record the trauma of an idealistically motivated nation plunged into a mechanised slaughter. By developing the individual soldier’s past life in detail and placing it in juxtaposition with the war, the authors of World War II novels provide the basis for an understanding of the point of view of the enlisted man as a person rather than as a symbol of a national outlook which he tended to be in World War I fiction.

The revulsion at the endless slaughter expressed in the novels of World War I was in keeping with the sentiment of the whole western world; in the novels of the second war the element of disillusionment is less significant. The war presents different problems to different characters – problems which must be worked out in keeping with their special personalities. Generally the atmosphere of war emphasises the characteristics the individual already possesses; the brave become braver, the cowardly more cowardly, the brutal more brutal.
Perhaps the prime question that was answered differently in the two wars was the question of the relationship existing between the individual, his own country and the enemy. In the context of World War I, initially at least the enemy was very clearly defined. He was the Hun and it could be taken for granted that any American youth regardless of his background would wish to fight against him. In the novels of the second world war, the enemy is rarely seen and only occasionally identified as the Germans or the Japanese. Instead the enlisted man more and more frequently expresses his resentment against “them”. It is that the “they” who are responsible for the war and for the enlisted man’s misfortunes. Governments in general are the object of the soldiers’ bitterness. The barely articulated resentments of Valsen and Gallagher in The Naked and the Dead are not directed against the Japanese but against the “fugged up army”. These characters reflect an increasing cynicism of the American citizen in regard to the purposes for which a war is fought, a process which culminates in Yossarins’ (Catch 22) decision that the war is a plot by both sides to murder him. The fact that war itself, not any given nation represents the real threat to human happiness finds expression in a line from William Butler Yeats, “Those that I fight I do not hate”; it is this idea that John Hersey took as the motive for his novel about a bomber crew in England.

If combat raised special problems for the civilian who suddenly found himself cast as a soldier, the occupation of conquered countries presented him with problems that were all the more acute because of the nature of the society from which he had come. The American was faced with the necessity of maintaining his perspective

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despite his own absolute power, his lack of experience and the subtle blandishments of a people prepared to do anything in order to survive.

For Americans in general the experience of World War II was broader than that of World War I in that it touched every income group, but it had special significance for one segment of American society – the Jews – Alfred Kazin refers to 1945 as a "pivotal year" in the history of the Jewish writer in America: the year in which the Jew became able to form part of the "modern movement" by expressing his cultural heritage as part of the larger intellectual scene. At this point, as the war provided subject matter for writers like Wouk, Bellow and Mailer, "The Jewish writer.... had particular reason to feel that this most terrible of all events in Jewish history bound him more closely to every fundamental question of human nature in Europe's self destruction", that is in the same year that the Jewish writer emerged from the intellectual ghetto, he was faced with questions that were not only national but international in scope.

The armed forces presented a multifaceted problem to the American Jew. The characteristics normally attributed to the race in fiction (a desire to be liked, a powerful sense of tradition and community life, an awareness of the suffering of the race as a long standing fact, and a sense of cultural superiority to the gentiles) practically guaranteed that they would come into collision with the mode of life in the army. The impersonality of the army would make it difficult for them to feel that their efforts were appreciated; the dispersal of their numbers into the vastness of the armed forces would deprive them of a sense of kinship and mutual contact and, above all else, the normal military harshness in dealing with recruits could easily be misinterpreted as anti-Semitism.
If the Jew had the inherent tendency to be at odds with military life, the situation was rendered vastly more complex both by the acknowledged anti-Semitism of many Americans and by the special horrors of the Nazi regime. The German atrocities against the Jews placed a special obligation on the American Jew to fight against the Nazis, but once he had enlisted he found himself in a context that was fundamentally inimical to his way of thinking. He also found himself forced into the ironic position of trying to fight against German anti-Semitism when the people with whom he served very frequently showed that they were anti-Semitic too.

The irony of this situation has been exploited in many of the novels of the Second World War especially those of Wouk, Shaw, Mailer Martha Gellhorn and Merle Miller. In *The Naked and the Dead* Mailer's two Jewish soldiers function as small cogs in a large divisional machine which is under the direction of a man who is essentially a fascist. Their attempts to defend themselves against the inherent prejudice of their fellow soldiers drive them to take extreme measures, all the more ironic for being futile. Goldstein's superhuman attempt to carry Wilson – a southerner – back to the beach, after he is wounded results in Wilson's death en-route. Roth is stung by the epithet "you Jew bastard" which compels him to take the final suicidal leap across the mountain chasm realising very well that his act will not have any effect on the ingrained prejudice of men like Gallagher. "If he refused to jump, Croft would have to come back. The patrol would be over .... But the platoon wouldn't understand. They would jeer him, take relief from their own weakness in abusing him. His heart was filled with bitterness."  

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9 Mailer, Norman – *The Naked and the Dead*, Page 562
The Thin Red Line who formed the spearhead of the anti militarist tendency of the war novels of the absurd which began to appear in the late fifties. Here we have a hero who rejects service in the American armed forces for reasons that spring from his position as a Jew, and he draws the strength to endure his treatment in the stockade from the cultural heritage of his race, just as his particular humanism is coloured by his Jewish background. The implication is that the moral strength required to stand against the accepted code of conduct of western society – a code which seems compulsively directed against self destruction – springs from an older and much abused society. Just as Faulkner in his treatment of southern society looked to the Negro’s enduring qualities of patience, humour and compassion – forged through a long history of adversity – to eventually supersede the sterility and selfishness of the Anglo-Saxon ruling class, so too the war novelists turns to another maligned expatriate group for those qualities that seemed to offer an adequate response to the prospect of universal destruction.

The trench warfare of 1917 was very different from the blitzkrieg tactics of the second war. The doctrine of total war was followed by fascism and the democracies to an unparalleled level. “War always concentrates and reveals the potential forces of collective life as they are embodied in the given social organisation.”¹⁰ The preparation for war that necessitated disastrous sacrifices of human values coupled with the vast geographical scope of the second war made the later conflict less comprehensible than anything that had ever happened. Before it the writer’s imagination understandably quailed. The writer saw that the individual had to struggle

¹⁰ Wright, Quincy – A Study of War (University of Chicago Press, 1942) Page 261
constantly against the impersonality of his military organisation and the meaninglessness of his activity. The war and the military took their proper place as prime forces working towards the depersonalisation of modern man.

In the light of these encouragements to silence, what did the writer do? He wrote, and paradoxically produced a large body of work about the war. No other war in American history has been so fully recorded in fiction, from a purely quantitative point of view. And when the writer wrote, how did he write? Some writers imitated Hemingway. It has been claimed that Hemingway perfected the language of war, that his style and his manner were peculiarly appropriate to combat and writers naturally fell back on the remembered rhythms of his language, which had possibly given them their first idea of war. Those who imitated Hemingway did not often penetrate beyond the manner. They did not try to record combat as the real thing experienced by one who was there; or when infrequently they did try, they did not succeed. They did not, like Hemingway and Stephen Crane before him, find themselves obsessed with the conquest of fear, and so feel compelled to render the experience of war with vivid accuracy as a meaningful gesture in their own lives.

The shadow of Ernest Hemingway fell early and deep on many American writers during the 1930s and 1940s. Nineteen forty-eight featured Hemingway revisited in the guise of The Naked and the Dead and Mailer was held as Papa’s heir apparent for the post war generation. Although both were exponents of life styles that pushed their writings off stage, one cannot include Hemingway and Mailer in the same slot of literary history. The radical transfiguration of American life and letters in the 1950s and 1960s has pushed Hemingway and Mailer into separate spheres – Hemingway’s culture was ripe for a “separate peace,” Mailer’s seemed ripe for a
separate war. The two world wars, supposedly Hemingway's and Mailer's twin springboards, make for little harmony. In the South pacific Private Mailer with his hot dream of being first with the big post war novels looks tame next to the legendary adventures of a warrior Papa with his 237 mortar fragments from World War I. Mailer's world, Dachau, Hiroshima and man on the moon is tone deaf to a writer whose shadow loomed over bull rings, safaris and big and little wars.

On the other hand the novels of World War II and the later period are more wide ranging in subject and content. The techniques of Dos Passos and the breadth of inquiry suggested by Hemingway are still influential, but numerous other factors are also active. The subjective autobiographical approach intensely bound to personal experience has given way to the application of virtually all variants of literary style, structure, point of view and characterisation. Similarly the focus of the contemporary war novel reflects the impact of history, psychology, philosophy and ideology. Perhaps these qualities are best embodied in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*.

War is the collective image for Mailer's earliest portrayal of his vision – a fictive world based on alienation, anxiety and atavism. While *The Naked and the Dead* impressed the literary public as the first important World War II novel, Mailer claims "I intended it to be a parable about the movement of man through history. I tried to explore the outrageous propositions of cause and effect, of effort and recompense in a sick society". ¹¹ This enlarges the novel's scope to include much more than a representation of war.

¹¹ Quoted from "Norman Mailer" by Donald Kaufman in *The New Yorker*, Oct 23, 1948
In "The White Negro", Mailer writes "the second world war presented a mirror to the human condition which blinded any one who looked into it....one was then obliged to see that no matter how crippled and perverted an image of man was the society he had created, it was nonetheless his creation, his collective creation (at least his collective creation from the past) and if society was so murderous, then who could ignore the most hideous of questions about his own nature?"  

What we encounter in Mailer's first novel is a work of enduring power, a power which is simply incommensurate with the novel's reputation. We have tended to value Mailer's first novel for the wrong reasons: as a guide to combat during World War II, as a work of social criticism, as the best of our recent war novels. The Naked and the Dead is all of these things and more. At the age of twenty-five, Mailer was able to use his military experience as the backbone of a long and complex narrative which transcends limits we usually have in mind in thinking of "war novels". The Naked and the Dead presents a terrifying view of men at war, specifically the invasion of the Japanese held island of Anopopei, which the novel follows from the landing operation to the final mopping up details. But the war as we see it in this grinding, blundering campaign is used as a mirror of vaster social and historical issues that pertain to the kind of world men must live in when the battles are finally won or lost. The dramatic link between these areas of meaning in the novel is Cummings, the brilliant, power-crazed general who directs the campaign, and his staff officer Lt. Hearn, a disillusioned and misanthropic liberal. The war itself is seen in a double focus. It is first observed from the impersonal vantage point of staff officers playing a military chess game. But it is also observed from the individual point of view of the men who constitute a reconnaissance platoon headed by the brutal Sgt. Croft. The

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only link between these two areas of meaning – an awesome gulf of prejudice and authority separates enlisted men from officers – is Lt. Hearn who assumes command over the platoon. This personal view of the action is linked with the broader social implications of the novel by means of the Time Machine, abbreviated portraits of the men yet loaded with significance. This is a direct borrowing from John Dos Passos’ technique in his USA trilogy. The thematic structure of the novel is thus seen to be a series of points of view running full circle at the dead centre: an image of man broken and harried.

Certainly The Naked and the Dead is more than the “report” of a sensitive young man who survived active service and returned to tell the tale. Mailer began to plan his novel long before his combat experience at Luzon and Leyete. He has traced its origins to the first days of America’s participation in World War II:

“I may as well confess that by December 8th or 9th of 1941, in the forty-eight hours after Pearl Harbour, while worthy young men who were wondering where they could be of aid to the war effort ..... I was worrying darkly whether it would be more likely that a great war novel would be written about Europe or the Pacific.”

Much as Gen. Cummings plans the campaign of Anopoei, Mailer at nineteen was already formulating his strategy for a major novel. While still at Harvard, he wrote a short novel which can only be considered a trial run for The Naked and the Dead – a Calculus at Heaven. From books published during the war such as John Hersey’s Into the Valley and Harry Brown’s A Walk in the Sun he got the idea of writing a novel about a long patrol. In fact it was this decision which led Mailer to volunteer for service in a reconnaissance outfit. These facts suggest that Mailer went

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13 Mailer, Norman – Advertisements for Myself (New York, 1959) Page 28
to war in search of combat experience which would enable him to complete a novel he had already conceived.

The novel uses the strategy of the microcosm. Here the little world, the military campaign on the island of Anopopei represents the entire Pacific war theatre, or any war at any time. Mailer’s strategy also concerns the military unit. The macrocosmic army - the universal world of regimented men – is depicted in the image of an intelligence and reconnaissance unit. Episodes centering at headquarters, with its white collar atmosphere, are spaced between scenes that show the infantry beset with drudgery and crime. Mailer stresses how disconnected these little worlds are. Not only has communication broken down vertically between officers and enlisted men, it has failed horizontally as well. As a little map mirroring vaster ones, Anopopei is an isolated island, subject only to the laws of war.

War keeps a man from knowing his fellows and it also confuses him in respect to time. In a sense war provides him with a new calendar. The wartime hours, days, weeks and months cause soldiers to reappraise their past. Since man’s initial need for time division is a way of acknowledging his mortality, a belief in the greater probability of his own death can alter his sense of the present. During a war, every moment verges on the last. Living in the present becomes oppressive while living in the future becomes absurd. As a result the past almost imperceptibly acquires the temporal content of the present – a fact that confronts Mailer’s soldiers. Already ensnared in a spatial prison, they begin to tell time by the calendar on its walls. Confused by their wartime visions, officers and common soldiers alike increasingly fail to distinguish between peacetime and wartime. Yesterday and yesterday’s future give way to what Mailer would term the “enormous present”. Near the novel’s
conclusion Mailer inserts a "mute chorus" entitled "On what we do when we get out" which drones out GI fantasies, a chorus which Mailer "mutes" with the following preference: "sometime spoken, usually covert, varying with circumstance". The concept of time "varying with circumstance" also shapes the numerous Time Machines. Throughout these snap survey inter chapters of the various characters' pasts, there is a tendency to portray peacetime as an inverted form of war. As omniscient author, Mailer imprints each past with the soldier's present consciousness. Cities and hometowns are now characterised by settings so filthy that friend and neighbours act like animals in a jungle. Past journeys are reinterpreted as dreaded uprootings. Ambitions once considered a sure way to success, are now recast into treacherous symptoms of futility. Apart from the Time Machines, memories are also reshaped. Many soldiers can no longer recall their loves, and their imaginations keep accusing wives or lovers of sexual infidelity. The Mailer soldiers distort time, and time distorts itself – a displacement in time to match the dislocation in space.

The theme of a world at war sets up the title. Mailer has stated (Current Biography, 1948) that the term "Naked" refers both to the war mongering fanatics and the men "whose minds are so tainted". But Mailer's image of uniformed men being stripped also accents the more universal implication.

"In the author's eyes, The Naked and the Dead is not a realistic documentary; it is rather, a symbolic book of which the basic theme is the conflict between the beast and the seer in man. The number of events experienced by one platoon couldn't possibly have happened to any one army platoon in the war, but represents a composite view of the Pacific war. The mountain the platoon attempts to climb represents death and man's creative urge, fate, man's desire to conquer the elements – all kinds of things that you never dream of separating and stating so baldly." (Current Biography, 1948)

What Mailer more explicitly means by the conflict between the beast and the seer is war's tendency to reduce man to an animal existence and his repeated attempts
to reassert his humanity. Metaphorically the clothes to be removed are civilisation’s. A man prepared for war is at the outset made uncivilised (released from certain restraints), before being furnished a weapon, and before being urged to commit violence and murder sanctioned by society, state and God. Bestiality will result if the conditioning to wartime behaviour lasts long enough.

There are many allusions to man reverting to beast. Dog eat dog, and a dog tag is hung around a man’s neck. Mailer’s own fictional analogy to Pavlov’s experiments with dogs points out another fact of war – instead of a man fearing to become an animal, he is more fearful of becoming a man and not surviving. Embodied as beasts entering a world governed by instinct the soldiers can only dimly recall their displaced manhood. Above the enlisted man, higher in the hierarchy of bestiality, the officers’ style of atavism is more refined. On reviewing his relationship with Gen. Cummings, Lt. Hearn can analyse what those ranked lower can only feel:

"He had been the pet, the dog, to the master, coddled and curried, thrown sweetmeats until he had had the presumption to bite the master once. And since then he had been tormented with the particular absorbed sadism that most men could generate only toward an animal."

Despite the widespread brutishness, an occasional human value (always brief and futile) will emerge, like Gallagher’s mild Catholicism or Martinez’s childlike patriotism. But usually the soldier’s response to the supernatural or the idealistic is either a terrified awareness of some malignant force, such as that “something .... watching over their shoulder and laughing” or Pollack’s epithet for God – “he sure is a sonofabitch”. Within such Godless stone walls the symbolic network operating

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14 Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 230
15 Ibid, Page 313
16 Ibid, Page 39
must elect a Cummings to the rank of “seer”, the prophet of eternal regimentation. Only the general has enough intellect and experience to see the bestiality in Anopopei in its historical perspective. By permitting a Cummings to come (to echo his name) a corrupt America has taken on the role of metaphorical tailor, stripping its people of civilian authority while reclothing its army with brute power. Without those trappings of technology necessary to combat their natural environment, the soldiers must face nature on its own terms. The weather and the jungle are even more terrifying than the enemy. Typhoons rage and trails are labyrinthian. Nature and man’s odours mingle to an overpowering stench. Only at the heights where vestiges of civilisation like soap, promotions and ambitions still exist does the jungle serve any useful purpose. “Cummings had a sensation of being suspended in air.....the jungle seems to strip him of everything but the quick absorbed functioning of his mind.” In this instance the human mind is at least busy “somewhere in space” — an example of what Mailer means by a theme focussed on “death and man’s creative urge, fate, man’s desire to conquer the elements.”

In The Naked and the Dead chance and a quirk of nature take over Anopopei. It is the fumbling Major Dalleson with his blind, lucky decision who manages to win the campaign, while Cummings the master strategist is away. The chaos of war linked to the blind powers of nature shows up when Wilson’s body is washed away after Ridges and Goldstein had undergone the ordeal as litter bearers. On Mount Anaka the hornet’s nest which ruins Croft’s quest to attain the summit also highlights the approach to “man’s creative urge” and “man’s desire to conquer the elements”. Jungle

17 Ibid, Page 105
warfare assumes a creativity expressed in a coarser manner. Physical skills surpass mental ability. Brutish man discovers that his “creative urge” either compels him to be the anointed leader of the animal pack, as in the case of Cummings or to conquer nature, the proving ground of the war itself. Sgt. Croft, a sanctioned killer during peacetime now in wartime seeks to become “an idealist” (Pollacks phrase). Standing relentlessly above these challenges towers Mount Anaka stirring terror in the minds of all. When Hearn peered into Croft, Mailer labels it looking down into an “abyss”. Within the symbolic context, the “abyss” characterised by man’s reversion to beast, must possess a counterpart at the peak – man’s highest possible attainment as an animal. And when climbing Croft can feel the senses inflamed by the power of his own destiny. At the other end are the men under Croft’s command resentful and afraid. “They had discovered they could not hate him and do anything about it, so they hated the mountain, hated it with more fervour than they could ever have hated another human being.”18 Mount Anaka has remained always in the background of the campaign, a massive distant representative of monolithic nature. But in the final portion of the book when the platoon must climb it, it has become a force in its own right. As an exploratory measure upon which the decision to launch a daringly unorthodox attack may depend, Gen. Cummings sends a platoon led by Lt. Hearn, to scout the other side of the island. The full irony of the uselessness of the mission, and of the larger plan itself is not made clear until the very end of the novel.

In the landing craft, immediately before they begin their march, the men have a clear view of Anaka:

18 Ibid, Page 698
"Far in the distance they could see Mount Anaka rising above the island. It arched coldly and remotely from the jungle beneath it, lofting itself massively into the low-hanging clouds of the sky. In the early drab twilight it looked like an immense old elephant erecting himself somberly on its front legs his haunches lost in the green bedding of his lair. The mountain seemed wise and powerful and terrifying in its size. Gallagher stared at it in absorption, caught by a sense of beauty he could not express. The idea, the vision he always had of something finer and neater and more beautiful than the void in which he lived trembled now, pitched almost to a climax of words."

The perversion of this aesthetic appearance to one of unmitigated horror and the metamorphosis of the men into plodding, cringing animals in the course of their battle with the mountain are rendered more powerful by the initial view of Mount Anaka. A hornet’s nest ends this quest for the mountain peak. Does this fateful conclusion satisfy Croft? "Deep down himself, Croft was relieved ... was rested by the unadmitted knowledge that he had found a limit to his hunger." Somewhere in his subconscious, Croft accepts his own limitations. To become a seer in this world is to acquire isolation – only Cummings has the mind to dare such a superhuman ascent. Every man is dehumanised to some extent by the debilitating efforts demanded by the climb. Only three men are actually killed in the course of the mission. Red Valsen, the enlisted liberal counterpart of Lt. Hearn, faced finally with a situation with which he cannot cope alone, is forced to relinquish all pride in his own strength as an individual. The combination of nature as represented by Anaka and the army as represented by Croft has beaten him, and he admits it. For Croft the mountain becomes the ultimate foe, and something in him breaks when he fails against it.

As part of the strategy of the wartime microcosm, The Naked and the Dead becomes an extended commentary on man’s isolation not only from time and space, but even from his fellowmen. The action is divided into four parts: the invasion of
Anopopei, the deadlocked campaign for the island, the dénouement and lastly the sudden disintegration of the Japanese defence for the mopping up operations and the return of the men and the island to ironic normality.

Behind all this is the large gallery of characters “with tainted minds”. On Anopopei there is a representative of every personality type from every part of America. There is Croft, psychopathic Texan, Red Valsen, drifter from Montana; Wilson, abusive Southerner; Gallagher, right wing Irishman from Boston; Brown, all American guy from Tulsa; Ridges, religious farmer from Mississippi; Martinez, Mexican from San Antonio; Pollack, petty Chicago racketeer and Goldstein, a Brooklyn Jew. The two most fully developed characters are, however, the two men at the top, Gen. Cummings, the fascist philosopher, and Hearn the misanthropic liberal – two thinking men, products of small town capitalism and the two most complex characters in the novel. All the characters, however, irrespective of rank share the same predicament – disentangling the war with nature, and the enemy from the war among and within themselves. For the officers, the problem consists of preserving rationality in an increasingly irrational world. The enlisted man’s dilemma lies in preserving ones identity in a world dedicated to the mass obedience to the army. Unless the vestiges of civilisation are strengthened, men will be reduced to regimented pawns at the mercy of martial law.

Mailer’s narrative stresses the drifting away of characters from “seer” to “beast”, as instinct becomes the compelling force and they become possessed by the darker promptings of their mind. In such an atavistic world only Cummings has some higher aspirations in keeping with his “pathological adjustments” to a jungle world. Otherwise, mutual suspicion and hatred overcome the rest. Of course there are minor
exceptions in Goldstein’s genuine concern for his wife and child, Red Valsen’s affection for the rookie Hennessey and Toglio’s simple patriotism.

Their general passing away into the way of the “beast” is best made clear in the episode of the hunt, where drunken soldiers scavenge for souvenirs among the dead – dead long enough to turn purple and green. This hunt is a nightmare revealing in Chester Eisinger’s words “the deepest urge towards violence and debasement in human beings”. Red finds it oppressive because he must pass through piles of rotting bodies. The stench is overpowering, the corpses horribly distorted and maggot ridden. Suddenly Red is sober and very weary. Unlike the others, Red is aware that he is surrounded by men. Standing over one such body he experiences a kind of epiphany:

“Very deep inside himself he was thinking that this was a man who had once wanted things, and the thought of his death was always a little unbelievable to him. The man had had a childhood, a youth and a young manhood, and there had been dreams and memories. Red was realising with surprise and shock, as if he were looking at a corpse for the first time, that a man was really a very fragile thing.”

On the other hand, in perhaps one of the most terrifying vignettes of men at war we see in Martinez a “mixture of guilt and glee” as he smashes a corpse’s mouth and absconds with its gold teeth. In desecrating the dead of his own species, here man is abandoning his own identification as a human being. Here we see that the beast has finally overcome the seer in man.

Throughout the novel, the stock responses of the soldiers of bigotry, cynicism and obscenity conceal their few redeeming qualities innate in every man everywhere. They very rarely reveal inner resources of strength not to yield to the non-human.

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22 Mailer, Norman – *The Naked and the Dead*, Page 216
The incident concerning the wounded Wilson’s journey with the help of his fellow soldiers through difficult jungle terrain is one of the most brutal and vivid pictures of wartime endurance. The litter bearers’ bodies ache and their minds turn delirious. However, their hatred for this thankless job imposed by the army is replaced by “guilt and empathy and the torments of his wound seemed to pass through the handles of the stretcher up into their arms”. This movement into an instinctive sympathy for a comrade’s suffering renews those bonds which interlock men in a universal brotherhood. At first the loss of egoism within the stretcher bearers is too sudden, since war had conditioned them to survive through selfishness in a battle of “the survival of the fittest”. “Each of them was fighting his private battle.” And soon two of the litter bearers, Stanley and Brown, due to complete exhaustion, lack the necessary energy to continue seeking a higher existence than a beast in a jungle. Finally drained and defeated after having lost Wilson’s body in the violent rapids, Goldstein and Ridges, the two remaining men, sprawl on the beach unconsciously concerned for each other. Two soldiers, alone but paradoxically together, have shared a journey into an uncharted region, not on Croft’s prophetic mountain but on that psychic terrain that distinguishes man from beast.

In 1914, T.E. Hulme predicted with accuracy, what now seems akin to prophecy that twentieth century art was moving towards the creation of forms “associated in our minds with the idea of machinery”; toward the time when a sculptor would prefer to organic, natural forms, “the hard clean surface of a piston

\[23\] Ibid, Page 624
\[24\] Ibid, Page 625
rod".\(^{25}\) Again from the earliest times, Lewis Mumford points out "war has been perhaps the best propagator of the machine".\(^{26}\) It is in war that mechanisation – and its associate forces of industrialism and staticism – acquired their most dramatic force. Thus it is in the war novels that the man/machine conflict finds its most intense and direct expression.

A close examination reveals in many American World War II novels a very definite focus on the machine and a violent protest against it. The bizarre world of Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22* (1961), despite its hilarious absurdity is a brutal expose of machine society carried to its most frightening extreme – an Orwellian nightmare peopled by totally amoral creatures, in which absolute power is vested in the state through military, financial and industrial control. But perhaps the influence of the machine, can nowhere be seen better than in *The Naked and the Dead*. This novel underlines and clarifies the function of the machine as a controlling metaphor of World War II novels by demonstrating the organic importance of that metaphor.

The central conflict of the novel is between the mechanistic forces of the “system” and the will to individual integrity. Gen. Cummings, brilliant and a ruthless spokesman for fascist power and iron handed Sgt. Croft personify the machine. Opposing them in the attempt to maintain personal integrity and identity are Cummings’ confused young aid Lt.Hearn and Pvt. Red Valsen, rebellious members of Croft’s platoon. Mailer, (as often commented upon by critics such as Harold Bloom) however, fails to bring this conflict to any satisfying resolution: at the novel’s end


\(^{26}\) Ibid,
Hearn is dead and Valsen’s pride is defeated, but likewise both Croft and Cummings face their own personal humiliations. However, despite the ambiguity of the resolution, the nature of it is not ambiguous. The main focus of the novel is on man’s struggle against the depersonalising forces of modern society: the forces of the machine. Character, imagery symbolism and structure all contribute to the formation of a sustained metaphor in which the army, the battle and above all else the war itself stands as an all pervasive symbol of the machine age.

The structural device of alternation between events on the island and the Time Machine flashbacks into the past lives of the characters places them squarely in the context of the twentieth century: driven and moulded by forces associated in general with modern industrialism and often specifically mechanistic. Cummings, the supreme embodiment of the machine, is a direct product of the heartland of American industrialism, the Midwest just after the turn of the century. His father teaches him an industrial ethic based on hate and fear which he later incorporates with his military ambition to form the fascist ideology he expounds to Hearn. Hearn too is the scion of a factory man, who escapes from crude materialism and tries to formulate his own confused humanism that makes him a foil for Cummings. Aboard ship on his way to the Pacific, he agonises over the futile condition of the young trapped in mechanised America.

“Somewhere in America now were the cities, and the refuse sitting on the steps, the electric lights and the obeisance to them.

(All the frenetic schemings, the cigar smoke, the coke smoke, the passion for movement like an ant nest suddenly jarred. How do you conceive your own death in all the marble vaults, the brick ridges and the furnaces that lead to the market place?)
And all the bright young people of his youth had butted their heads smashed against things until they got weaker and the things still stood.

A bunch of dispossessed ... from the raucous stricken bosom of America."^27

The Boston tough guy Gallagher is caught between the monotonous drab life of a city worker and the romantic idealism which he dreams of:

"What's in it for a guy? Work tomorrow. (he would defend the lady in the lavender dress with his sword). He fell asleep in the chair, and in the morning he had a cold".28

Goldstein is trapped in the facile and mediocre conformity of materialistic lower middle class. On his twenty-five dollar welder's salary he and his wife settle down to drab matrimony. Brown is the typical industrial salesman, hating the system he is part of. Red Valsen, takes the hobo's road in an attempt to escape the overpoweringly real threat of the machine, which threatens to trap him in a mechanistic inferno.

"By the time he is fourteen he is able to use a drill. Good money for a kid, but down in the shafts, at the extreme end of the tunnel there isn't room to stand. Even a kid works in a crouch, his feet stumbling in the refuse of the ore that has been left from filling the last car. It's hot of course and damp, and the lights from their helmets are lost quickly in the black corridors. The drill is extremely heavy and a boy has to hold the butt against his chest and clutch the handles with all his strength as the bit vibrates into the rock ... Red has ten hours a day six days a week. In the winter time he can see the sky on Sundays.

Puberty in the cold dust."^29

By abruptly shifting again and again from "the raucous stricken bosom of America" back to the island and the army which is obviously more intensely mechanistic, the structural pattern keeps the machine metaphor constantly in the fore.

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27 Mailer, Norman - The Naked and the Dead, page 352-353
28 Ibid, Page 279
29 Ibid, Page 222-223
“This novel is not just about men in mechanised war, but men in mechanised society, the epitome of which is war.” Together with this basic structure, the novel’s two primary symbols, the mountain and the army, accentuate the tensions of the man-machine dichotomy by presenting a more general yet fundamental conflict against which those tensions are projected. That is, the efforts of Hearn and Valsen to preserve their human integrity by resisting the forces of mechanism represented by Cummings and Croft. This in turn parallels the broader resistance of nature to the threat of violation by the machine. It is significant that the Japanese play a negligible role as the enemy. The real objective of the battle, pursued mainly by Croft and Cummings, is to harness the men and the machines they command in order to control the island. Mount Anaka, looming tall and stately above the teeming jungle symbolises the regal force and natural formidability of the organic world. The army machine is pitted against the mountain and the jungle in a confrontation which is both literal and symbolic. The General’s attempts to penetrate the jungle are threatened by the most elemental forces of nature, the machine’s primal opponent: rain that comes as a deluge and washes away the roads, and the hyper-organic barrier of the jungle itself “damp and rife and hot and alive with the rapt absorbed sounds of vegetation growing”. “No army, “ Mailer adds to confirm the point, “could live or move in it”. Croft’s all consuming drive to cross the mountain with his patrol is thwarted by the disparate forces of nature: the cold, bruising river, the jungle barrier, then the mountain itself overwhelming and treacherous and finally with brutal comic irony, the swarm of hornets that turns this grim assault into a farce.

30 Bloom, Harold (ed)– Norman Mailer (Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) Page 120
31 Ibid, Page 45
Thus, the primary structural and symbolic aspects of *The Naked and the Dead* is accented by the conflict between man (and the natural forces with which he is associated) and the machine. Within this broad metaphorical context the conflict is powerfully manifested through four major characters. Much of the ironic and dramatic intensity of the novel comes from its double view of the battle for Anopopei. We see the campaign from afar as it is directed by Cummings and then converted into immediate reality, how it is actually carried out in the field. The dual view reveals another aspect of the battle – the one between man and machine.

This conflict at the officer level, between Cummings and Hearn is complicated by the problematics of their relationship. The General’s latent homosexual attitude towards Hearn is at once tender and cruel and Hearn sees the same ambitions for power and control in the General (aspects that he despises) mirrored in his own nature. Apart from these attributes, however, their opposition to one another is abundantly clear, for while Gen. Cummings is a product of a Midwestern industrial-materialistic family, Hearn has fled from exactly such a background, bewildered at the plight of his generation caught in a mechanical world. Hearn is throughout the novel, pitted against the General and his brutally rigorous theories of the need for the individual to pay obeisance to the machine. In contrast to the General, Hearn’s ideas seem weak and ineffectual once again accentuating the central theme that the individual is always ultimately smothered by the system. In a rebellious attempt to defy that system, Hearn deliberately drops a cigarette butt on Gen. Cummings’ immaculately clean tent floor. Cummings not satisfied with bringing the mutineer down on his knees, cannot tolerate the threat to his power that Hearn represents. Hearn is banished to the patrol where he ultimately meets his death.
Cummings, not only is a spokesman for the machine, but he also seems to embody the machine in his personal life. He is coldly efficient and can work long hours without exhaustion, "without taking a halt, indeed without referring once to a map, or pausing for a decision...it had been a remarkable performance. His concentration had been almost fantastic."\(^3\) He has fantastic powers of memory and assimilation which indicate that his mind has capacities which extend beyond the purely human. Even his personal quarters reveal no careless human presence.

"The tent was so austere. The cot looked unslept in, the desk was bare again, and the third and unoccupied chair rested at perfect right angles to the larger of the two foot-lockers. The tent floor was bare and clean unmarked by mud."\(^3\)

The antiseptic sterility of his tent seems to be the perfect setting for Cummings to expound his views - the more abstract manifestations of his machine mentality. It is for him the manipulation of the masses through hate and fear. The army "which he considers a model for future society" functions best when "you're frightened of the man above you, and contemptuous of your subordinates."\(^4\) And it is specifically a philosophy for the mechanised world:

"The machine technique of this century demands consolidation and with that you've got to have fear, because the majority of men must be subservient to the machine and its not a business they instinctively enjoy."\(^5\)

Cummings’ overpowering presence as a symbol for the machine becomes

\(^3\) Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 77
\(^3\) Ibid, Page 172
\(^4\) Ibid, Page 176
\(^5\) Ibid, Page 177
most explicit when he comes into contact with the actual artillery machine of his division.

"He realised the tenseness with which he had been waiting for the shell to land by the weak absorptive relief that washed through his body. All his senses felt gratified, exhausted. The war, or rather war was odd .... And yet there was a naked quivering heart to it which involved you deeply when you were thrust into it. All the deep dark urges of man, the sacrifices on the hilltop, and the churning lusts of the night and sleep, weren’t all of them contained in the shattering screaming burst of a shell, the man-made thunder and light? .... In the night, at that moment, he felt such power that it was beyond joy; he was calm and sober."[sup]\textsuperscript{36}\textsuperscript{36}

Firing one of the big guns himself, he experiences a kind of mechanistic orgasm. He is a man so influenced by the machine, its language, its power, its value that he not only defends it as an instrument of military and political control but has submitted his very being to its power. It is the object of his passion. In the entries he makes in his journal he compares the forces of the machine with those of life and regeneration, its objects with human beings. Thus the General’s presence in the novel as a symbolic character takes on important implications for the central theme of the novel: that the machine is capable of overpowering man’s most basic level of existence, of becoming a threat to his very nature and his humanity.

The conflict between man and machine is paralleled at the enlisted level in the battle of wills between Sgt. Croft and Red Valsen. In appearance each personifies the force he represents. Croft is like a robot man, “made of iron” and reputed to have no nerves. “His narrow, triangular face was utterly without expression ... and there seemed nothing wasted in his hard small jaw, gaunt firm cheeks and straight short nose. His thin black hair had indigo glints in it."[sup]\textsuperscript{37}\textsuperscript{37} Valsen, on the other hand whose opposition to the sergeant is paralleled in the jungle’s resistance to the machine, looks

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\[sup]\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, Page 566-567
\[sup]\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, Page 10
vitaly alive and human. Red-haired, florid and freckled he is prone to laughter. As this physical and temperamental contrast reflects, the two are natural enemies — Croft demanding submission from Valsen, and Valsen refusing to be controlled.

Valsen very much like Hearn is an escapee from the world of the machine and now finds in that escape a lonely and fragmented world. The only thing left for him in the island of Anopopei is his jealously guarded individuality, and it is this which he pits against Croft’s authority. The similarities between Croft’s and Cummings’ characters are many and often quite subtle. While Cummings at the moment when he discovers Hearn revolting against his authority feels that “if he had been holding an animal in his hands at the instant he would have strangled it”.\textsuperscript{38} Croft, in a brutal demonstration of power on the mountain crushes a bird in his hand. Cummings imbibes a mechanistic philosophy from his father, Croft learns from his, a love of guns which he uses with a strange lustful excitement very much like the general. While Cummings theorises about making men subservient to the machine, Croft translates those theories into practice by running his platoon through hate and fear.

Croft finally assumes the role of an enemy to Hearn when he becomes a surrogate for the general and in the process, a symbol of the machine. Cummings had assigned Hearn to the patrol because he posed a threat to his power; now Croft deliberately leads him to his death because his human approach to leadership once again threatens that power. Croft’s mad drive to conquer the mountain is paralleled in the quickened dramatic intensity of this section of the novel. Croft’s desire to make his platoon submit to his will is mirrored in the general’s own desire to make the division the instrument of his larger conquest. The climb up the mountain is in reality a symbolic journey for Croft in terms of a submergence of his humanity leading to the

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, Page 318
crushing of the bird in his hands, which anticipates Hearn's murder the very next day. In their final climactic stand off, the rifle that he levels against Valsen consequently becomes the ultimate symbol of the machine and its destructive power. The confrontation at this particular point ceases to be merely a confrontation between sergeant and soldier and becomes a symbolic confrontation between the machine incarnate and individual man in a last abortive act of rebellion. Just as Hearn had submitted to the general's will by picking up the cigarette butt from the floor in the fear of military punishment, Valsen here submits to Croft's will and the threat of his rifle. But just as Croft's last short climb up the peak is thwarted by a quirk of nature in the form of the hornets, so too the general's lust for personal glory is frustrated by the chance victory of the campaign during his absence.

The failure of both Cummings' and Croft's design would indicate the failure of the forces of the machine to conquer man and nature. This would justify reading the novel as a parable of man's refusal to be dehumanised by the forces of a mechanised society. Yet both Valsen's humiliation and Hearn's death indicate that individual man has lost his battle against the forces of the machine. In the last pages of the book we see the men of the platoon, anonymous and passive in returning to a deadening routine, knowing that all their efforts have been in vain and the campaign has been easily won in their absence. In this context the song they sing on the boat ride back takes on an ironic significance. "Roll me over/In the clover/Roll me over/Lay me down/And do it again."\footnote{Ibid, page 707}
The last thoughts of Red Valsen, broken symbol of the anti-machine seems best to capture the final mood:

"You carried it alone as long as you could, and then you weren't strong enough to take it any longer. You kept fighting everything, and everything broke you down, until in the end you were just a little goddamn bolt holding on and squeezing when the machine went too fast."

These words also echo a last clear evidence for the informing nature of the man-machine metaphor in the most influential American novel to emerge from World War II.

Stanley Guttman describes *The Naked and the Dead* as an "attempt to present a dilemma of power from a variety of perspectives". The philosophy of history Cummings reveals to Hearn in conversations charged with irony and silent antagonism, is one in which power looms dominant and unabashed. The future belongs to those exceptional members of the ruling class who can translate the potential of America into "kinetic energy". The true aim of the war is to supplant the decadent fascism of the old world by an authority more vigorous and cunning. Cummings believes that this century belongs to the reactionaries and Hitler is the true interpreter. Men must be controlled by hate and fear. As Cummings lectures Hearn "I can tell you Robert, that to make an army work you have to have every man in it fitted into a fear ladder". Cummings' theory is not restricted to the army alone, it extends to society at large. The machine age requires the consolidation of power – and there can be no power without fear. Hence Cummings concludes:

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40 Ibid, page 703-704
41 Gutman, Stanley – *Mankind in Barbary*. (Hanover, NH, 1975) Page 3
42 Mailer, Norman – *The Naked and the Dead*, Page 176
"The natural role of twentieth century man is anxiety," and adds, "Only the innocent are healthy, and the innocent man is a vanishing breed. I can tell you, nearly all of humanity is dead, merely waiting to be disinterred." Yet it is hard to reconcile Cummings' view with his statement. "There's that popular misconception of man as something between a brute and an angel. Actually man is in transit between brute and God." What is puzzling here is not the apparent contradiction contained in the General's thought but the ambiguity of Mailer's vision. The novel dramatises sickness and anxiety as historical facts; Croft's and Cummings aspiration to omnipotence but their divine ambition ends in futility. Thus we sense that even if their ambitions have the endorsement of the author, the explicit statement of the novel asserts defeat. Croft fails to climb his mountain, and the general wins the campaign through chance. "Omnipotence as private motive or historical destiny, gives way to impotence." The process of osmosis discussed in philosophical debate by Cummings and Hearn, whereby America becomes infused by the historical moment and transforms fascism into kinetic energy, becomes the ideological framework for the novel. Within such a theory, which is not opposed by any forceful counter argument, the American army provides an effective model for future social organisations. Cummings' theory is systematically and theoretically complete besides being lucidly articulated. The General has undergone a rigorous self-education; basically he postulates that a power elite will control the destiny of nations - he postulates a Nazi century. The tormenting of Roth and Gallagher's intense hatred of Jews, together with the class divisions

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43 Ibid, Page 322
44 Ibid, Page 323
between officers and men, seem to internalise within the novel the triumph of Cummings’ Hitler-like aphorism, “the only morality of the future is power morality”.46

In Cummings’ perspective social evolution may be likened to a condition of war. The Naked and the Dead as an imaginative environment seems designed for the dominance of men such as Cummings and Croft. The general, for example, thinks in the manner of an intellectual villain when he surveys his battle organisation; he gloats over thousands of men deployed under his command, troops charged with America’s energy which had become kinetic and could not be reversed. In such a mechanistic system, a rifle is spiritualised as an extension of man’s power and Cummings likewise apotheosises the machine. When he visits a gunner to supervise the firing, this logic is turned into a rhapsodic epiphany of war; Cummings sees into wars’ primitive psychological justification:

“The war, or rather war was odd … it was all covered with tedium and routine, regulations and procedure, and yet there was a naked quivering heart to it which involved you deeply when you were thrust into it …”47

Cummings, one of the most impressive creations in Second World War fiction, attains insight here into the bestiality of war, its atavistic power to strip away the complexities of modern life and to plunge the soldier back into the pre-history of man as a species. Such a vision acts for the general as a purifying instrument. Passages in Mailer’s novel, like this revelatory awareness of Cummings seem appropriate to dramatise the global scale and atomic energy of the Second World

46 Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 323
47 Ibid, Page 566
War. The potency of Cummings as a character and it is true of The Naked and the Dead as a whole, is that fascism is imaginatively apprehended at every level and dramatised as a working system of social control. Such a fictional logic informs The Naked and the Dead throughout.

This emerges structurally and linguistically through the novel’s concern with violence in thought and action, above all in the callous shooting of prisoners. The death of Hearn promises another prominent example: Croft callously plans the lieutenant’s death, instructing Martinez to remain silent about the Japanese still guarding the pass. The “fear ladder”, induces Martinez to obey Croft’s orders, and Hearn is pointlessly killed, ostensibly because he threatens Croft’s dominance of command over the platoon. The reality of Hearn’s death is, however, dissipated by his posthumous incorporation into the ranks of the hated officer class. “They’re all bastards.” This kind of prevailing nihilism, carried through the novel’s unity of tone and language, is also expressed through the soldiers’ maxims: “its all bloody noses;” “it never turns out as you want it;” “everybody loses;” “win or lose, its all in the cards,” or in Minetta’s vision of omnipotent destruction, “everything is smashed all over the world”. The shattering gyre of the war has deprived the troops of any individual control over events; they represent as Cummings envisions them in his game of chess with Hearn, mere pawns.

Mailer’s novel demonstrates the energy of negative emotions, of loathing, violence, disgust, parasitism and prejudice. A hint of the macabre side of this vision, is provided by a pattern of imagery related to sores, putrefaction, and bodily decay, as

when the novelist writes of Hearn, "He felt like an insect crawling through the entrails of a horse". The Naked and the Dead has much of this symbolism derived from the bowels and the mortuary. Here again, as an example, is Mailer's analysis of Hearn's feelings on another occasion: "He felt as if an enormous cyst of suppuration and purulence had burst inside him and was infecting his bloodstream now, washing through all the conduits of his body in a sudden violent flux of change." The imagery noted here confirms the impression that the reader receives of The Naked and the Dead as a moral fable designed to exhibit the regressive tendencies of men at war. The setting plays an important part in this context.

The locale initially has the properties of a magical island – a sensual land of "ruby wines, golden sands and indigo trees", but this vision cannot last and very soon Anopopei changes into a place like the surrounding "black, dead, ocean". Very much like William Golding in The Lord of the Flies, Mailer transports the men from any vestiges of urban civilisation, and places them near the elemental jungle and primordial ocean. The brutalities committed by the Americans seem to be thrown into relief by the terrain of a tropical rain forest.

Mailer borrows style and technique from his early literary influences - "I didn't have much literary sophistication while writing The Naked and the Dead. I admired Dos Passos immensely and wanted to write a book that would be like one of his. My novel was frankly derivative, directly derivative ... I had four books on my desk all the time I was writing: Anna Karenina, Of Time and the River, USA and

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49 Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 263
50 Ibid, page 280
51 Walsh, Jefferey – American War Literature (New York, 1982) Page 118
Studs Lonigan ... The atmosphere of *The Naked and the Dead*, the over-spirit is Tolstoy, the rococo comes out of Dos Passos, the fundamental slogging style from Farrell, and the occasional over-rich descriptions from Wolfe.”

In his reliance upon such models, Mailer demonstrated for the first and last time in his writing career, an “all-bets-covered-caution” with respect to the form his novel took. Critics have also been quick to point out the political and philosophical correspondences between the novel and its antecedents in the leftist American literary scene in the 1930s. In its stress upon deterministic views of human behavior, and its realization of a world in which the individual is dehumanised and subjected to the efficient functioning of entrenched systems of control, *The Naked and the Dead* may seem a somewhat stale recapitulation of a style and a vision inappropriate to a changed post war world. However, as Nigel Leigh has argued, one should not be misled by the novel’s dated style. Mailer's concern is neither primarily retrospective, nor a preoccupation with the war itself, but is rather prophetic of the crises of the post-war United States.

In the shadow of the Holocaust, Mailer like Saul Bellow, a fellow Jewish contemporary, saw America’s future, humanity’s future, as tending towards the cancellation of freedom and creative individualism. There are intriguing similarities to be found in Bellow’s first novel *The Dangling Man* and Mailer’s first novel. Both writers conclude their novels ironically, the war fought for freedom and democracy has somehow conspired to undermine the appeal of these ideals. In both novels we witness the demise of liberal humanism as it succumbs to the leash of military

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52 Quoted in Michael Glenday’s *Norman Mailer* (St. Martins Press, 1995) Page 48
structure. Major Dalleson’s emergence as mock hero through inadvertent circumstances, at the end of the novel anticipates such types in that other, rather delayed American novel of the Second World War, Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22*, where again we see the military as a paradigm of inhuman totalitarian bureaucracy.

Both Heller and Mailer, like Hemingway before them, offer us war as a metaphor for much else besides. In its structure and effects on men, it represents Mailer’s views of the modern social order. As Richard Poirier has noted “war was the determining force of his imagination long before he had the direct experience of it that went into his first big novel”.

Yet although the war is the context of his novel, he has very little to say about the enemy. As Leigh remarks “no attempt is made to write about the international nature of the war. In reality Mailer is concerned with the enemy located within…. the United States.” As we become more familiar with the platoon members we find what they most despise and fear is rooted in their prior experiences of life in America.

In Lt. Hearn’s view, only General Cummings seemed capable of transcending what he calls “the busy, complex mangle, the choked vacuum of American life”.

This is the America out of which Mailer’s soldier’s struggle. In contrast to it the war may even have its attractions- order, a certain place in the hierarchy, and the hope, however baseless, that soldiering would not be without its satisfactions. On board the landing craft taking them back from Mount Anaka, the platoon members find a certain startled pride in themselves... “we did okay to go as far as we did”.

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55 Mailer, Norman – *The Naked and the Dead*, Page 85
56 Ibid, Page 708
Mailer puts the America of the "Time Machine", one that chokes and mangles individual effort, an ironic reversal of the mythical land of untrammeled possibility, the dream America.

Who are the naked, who are the dead? The book’s title has become so famous that by now it is easy to ignore its curious implications. Most readers probably understand the title to mean “the naked and dead”, that is the blasted, stripped bodies of soldiers on a battlefield, the conventional scenery of innumerable war movies and innumerable blood-and-guts war novels. But that is not the title. It is the naked and the dead; that “and” implies not an identity but an opposition between the two key terms. If a heavy death count is one of the indices of “realism” in a war story this book is relatively peaceful. A total of four characters of any importance die in the course of the novel. Besides, there are not even any battle scenes in The Naked and the Dead. The single Japanese assault on the Americans is described indirectly in terms of a violent tropical storm. The final American breakthrough which ensures American control over the mythic Pacific island is hardly described at all, for while it is taking place, the main characters are on the other side of the island on a mission which contributes nothing to the success of the operation.

One clue to the subtler implications of Mailer’s title comes late in the course of the novel when Roth, a college educated, middle-aged Jew tired and battered by the anti-Semitism of his fellow soldiers sees through his panic and exhaustion - “all the protective devices, the sustaining facades of his life had been eroding slowly in the caustic air of the platoon; his exhaustion had pulled out the props,
blow had toppled the rest of the edifice. He was naked another way now. He rebelled against it, was frustrated that he could not speak to them and explain it away. 

This is nakedness in a different way — a few words and a blow have forced Roth to a point of existential nakedness where he confronts the fragile nature of his own mind and body without any props to mask himself from himself. Yet it is at this point of his nakedness that he is intensely alive — terribly frightened, exalted and intimately conscious of his most intensely conscious self. To be dead, on the other hand is never to have had such a moment of self revelation.

Roth’s moment of panic is indeed a minor one more fraught with terror and failure than with the exhilarating discovery of a new life. Yet it is an important incident for it helps us to see that among the many inter-related narrative structures of the novel — one way to read The Naked and the Dead is as a series, a carefully varied cluster of just such moments.

This confrontation between Roth and an intensely personal void, however, could not be possible without the pressures of so called peacetime society. The ironic interactions between Roth, a Brooklyn Jew, and Gallagher, a Boston Irish Catholic provide Mailer with one of his most enduring metaphors for an exploration of the national psyche. The real war in this novel, is not so much seen as a conflict between the Japanese and the Americans, but the ceaseless warfare of political and personal styles of identity, of dullness with vitality, of prejudice with vision, of the existentially naked with the imaginatively dead.

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57 Ibid, Page
58 McConnel, Frank D. — Four Post-War American Novelists (University of Chicago Press, 1977) Pg 67
The war as a historical fact is seen as a precipitating image. Since the Iliad, the most valuable stories of war have been stories about exactly what the extreme, restrictive situation of war does to men’s ideas of themselves, their world and their Gods. Mailer here manages to sustain and enrich that ancient tradition – to write a novel which is both a novel of manners as it is an epic of the battlefield.

Another moment of nakedness comes for Brown, the cowardly sergeant, while carrying the dying Wilson from the jungle to the beach. This moment of self revelation for Brown is in terms of almost tender solicitude for the dying man. The two men make small talk and Brown in a sudden rush of pity whispers, “Just take it easy, boy”, feeling for one brief moment the failure and disappointments of his own life open into a joyous feeling of participation and unity. “It could not last,” Brown realises.

“It was as if Brown had awakened in the middle of the night, helpless in the energies his mind had released in sleep. In the transit to awareness, to wakefulness, he would be helpless for a time, tumbling in the wake of his dream, separated from all the experiences, all the trivia that made his life recognisable and bearably blunted to himself. He would be uncovered, lost in the plane of darkness, containing within himself, not only all his history and all of the present in the ebbs and pulses of his body but he would be the common denominator of all men and the animals behind them, walking blindly in the primordial forests.”

This it seems, is the quintessential moment, when politics is wiped out and in its place is something vital leading to something visionary and momentous towards which all his characters strive, in one way or another. But for Brown it cannot last. In Mailer’s world a man is not just tested and refined by his moments of nakedness, he is

59 Ibid,
60 Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 537
also judged by them. If the man's past has been one of little hypocrisies, then the moment will not endure, will not result in a new more heroic style of living. The vision of Albert Camus bases itself upon this naked revelatory moment. In The Naked and the Dead, there is an intense ferocity with which the characters are judged – both by themselves and their creator – and frozen at the moment of judgement into the postures of their heroism or cowardice. His characters are all trapped within a testing and judging present, the present of the “naked moment”.

In The Naked and the Dead this highly individual quality of Mailer's work achieves its best expression: a blend of vision and story, form and substance which is lacking in Mailer's later novels, precisely because he never writes a novel about war itself – that vast tapestry of human activity.

On the one hand, the novel is a series of individual, existential confrontations of the members of the invading army, on the other hand it is also about the actions of men living and acting in the mass. If on the existential level of personal confrontation the book is a series of moments of revelatory nakedness, on the political level it is the large scale plot of the invasion and occupation of the island of Anopopei. On both levels, wartime conditions serve to refine and clarify the underlying qualities of everyday peacetime personality and politics.

The Homeric simile of war, celebrated ever after in the Western imagination, is turned inside out by Mailer in this novel. The killing and destruction of war is not seen as ironically deformed analogues to the acts of peacetime, but rather as ironically horrifying clarified extensions of those acts. Rather than seeing war as Homer and

61 McConnel, Frank D. – Four Post-War Novelists, Page 69
Virgil did, as a cancellation of peacetime urban life, Mailer presents us with an apocalyptic vision of war, as the ongoing, unacknowledged condition of the most pacific urban life.

Civilised life, according to Mailer, whatever its ordinary assurances is always, to the enlightened imagination involved in a state of total war between the visionary naked and the visionary dead.

This is the world of the novel. Who then are its heroes? Excepting Hearn and Cummings, surely none of its officers. Or is it the enlisted men? Some of these, like Red Valsen are presented as negative personalities throughout the novel; some like Roth, eternal victims; and a few like Wilson, just average men. None manages to understand his experience or bring life to account. But it is Cummings, Croft and Hearn who possess the richest personalities, and it is in their actions that the novel reveals itself.

Gen. Cummings nurses a vision of his manifest destiny. It is fed on sheer intelligence and power. His character is complex, contradictory and compelling because ruthlessness and sensitivity mingle in him. He has an almost demonic consciousness of power which threatens to choke him. In his desire to become God, he is constantly thwarted by the resistance of men. The campaign he wins defeats his most exalted Faustian ambition. Cummings on the island, is like Faust in his study seeking to “learn the things that hold/The world together at its core, /So (he) may potencies and seeds behold”.62

Sgt. Croft is Cummings’ earthly double. The General wants to mould the

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the curve of human destiny, the sergeant must climb Mt. Anaka, the highest peak on the island. Faust here assumes the guise of a Texan hunter – and criminal. For Croft shoots a man dead, though he is merely ordered to fire above the head of the rioteers and he murders a Japanese prisoner, after giving him a cigarette simply for the sinister excitement of the thing. Compared to Cummings, Croft’s sense of omnipotence is almost primitive. The mountain represents for him the way to his own immortality – everything he must know and conquer. He views it “with awe and hunger and the peculiar unique ecstasy he had felt after Hennessey was dead or when he had killed the Japanese prisoner”. The austerity of its peak beckons him to set foot on its crest which leads to Hearn’s death and goads his men to the breaking point.

Lt. Hearn, stands between these two “demonic heroes”, the natural enemy of both. But his defeat, though more final, has greater value and his role in the novel is central both from the thematic and dramatic standpoint. For Hearn is the dramatic link between the two other men who never meet. Cummings humiliates him and sends him to lead Croft’s platoon, and it is Croft who plots his death and assumes command. Furthermore, Hearn shows a latent affinity with the Faustian impulse of the two men he must oppose. He too wanted to shape the world in his own image and impose his will upon it, but he does not have the necessary passion and ruthlessness it takes. Aloof and somewhat cold, his intelligence is too skeptical, his disenchantment too real. He rebels against the affluent society his father represents and moves through the literary circles of Harvard away from the inadequacies of a liberal ideology. The communist intellectuals reject him as a quixotic bourgeois. A rebel first, he becomes a

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63 Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 379
drifter, an outsider, a spectator – till the war. But his contest with Cummings and with Croft later on, rescues Hearn from hollow disengagement. Defeated by the general, who in a symbolic gesture of subjugation forces him to pick up a cigarette butt, and destroyed by Croft through death, Hearn nevertheless achieves some dignity in the role of victim. He comes to understand why “it is better to be the hunted than the hunter”. The statement is a product of a crisis, the end of his encounter with adversity. It expresses the typical insight of the rebel victim. In the case of Hearn it is an advance over the philosophy which so far had shaped his life. “The only thing to do is to get by on style. He had said that once, lived by it in the absence of anything else, and it had been a working guide, almost satisfactory until now.”

Hearn’s belief in style stands in contrast to Croft and Cummings in effectiveness – the form of an action as against its results, the means versus the end. But in all cases, the characters appeal to no standard outside of themselves, no objective ideal. The ‘demonic hero’ creates meaning by blindly asserting his will. The ‘victim-hero’ finds meaning by carrying his meaning to the point of self-destruction. None of the “heroes” in this novel really succeeds in his search, although Hearn comes closer than any other to redeeming the wasteland of Anopopei.

But in this novel nobody wins. Mailer’s pessimism is implicit in the naturalistic literary philosophy as the very ground upon which his novel stands. The dominant view of experience here is that an overall futility marks man’s every effort. The role of accident in human life is so much more important than individual will, mind or skill that life appears to be meaningless. It is a naturalistic irony that

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64 Ibid, Page 280
Cummings should devote all his brilliant talents to his campaign to win the island from the Japanese, only to see victory come through accident through the blundering efforts of a stupid subordinate.\textsuperscript{65} And it is a naturalistic horror that Croft leads a reconnaissance behind the Japanese lines that discovers nothing and yields only intolerable suffering and senseless loss of life. It is a naturalistic cliché that the insensate world of nature should challenge and defeat man, as Mt. Anaka does provoke and conquer Croft, who sacrifices his men and himself to a blind compulsion to conquer it. Although it adds nothing to the pessimism of the book, the speech that Mailer gives to his characters is in the naturalistic tradition. It has the coarseness and monotony of the vulgate at its most scatological level.\textsuperscript{66}

The serious ideological content of the novel is on the whole satisfying, especially as Mailer has made it an integral part of his action, dramatising it in the conflict between Hearn and Cummings. But one troubling question remains. How can we have as a real threat a willed future and a controlled society in a naturalistic context which assure us that experience is meaningless because chance is all?

Ultimately the destiny of the human race, and of American society in particular is left, not with the stiff necked individual, nor with the military strongman or the intellectual. Rather it falls to the mediocre, placidly stupid, as represented by Major Dalleson. The very last scene in the novel shows him, pleased to be moored once again in the reassuring monotony of bureaucratic detail, filled with self satisfied

\textsuperscript{65} Eisinger, Chester, E. – Fiction of the Forties (University of Chicago Press, 1963) Page 37
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid
glee at one of his few original ideas: the use of a pin-up girl to illustrate the use of map co-ordinates.

This final implicit statement on the ascendancy of reactionary mediocrity in post-war America in conjunction with the pre-occupation with the theme of the shabbiness of the American dream, shows Mailer to be very much a social critic. The obvious and self admitted influence upon his work of Farrell, Steinbeck and Doss Passos places him at the beginning of his career within the literary continuum established by the social novels of the thirties.

In the last two decades following the publication of The Naked and the Dead, Mailer was to move progressively further from the use of obviously derivative elements in his fiction; but he was to remain consistently critical of the ills of American society. Closely linked with his involvement with immediately contemporary issues, and his impending break from the direct influence of other writers, is Mailer’s rejection of the common man held by social writers of the Depression. Instead we have a sophisticated and pessimistic vision of the human condition which is decidedly characteristic of post-war literary values. Yet it is this very element of concern with a more contemporary problem which draws vitriolic criticism of The Naked and the Dead from at least one critic writing in 1960. Daniel Spicehandler in his The American War Novel concludes his otherwise perceptive short treatment of Mailer’s book with this condemnation.

“What has Mailer learned from war? What is the question asked, the theme expounded in The Naked and the Dead .... What right has an author to choose the topic of war and neither to protest it or learn something from it? ....Mailer leaves the reader with no tragic sense. One would suppose that so brutal a description of war must result in bitter protest. Instead, his war experience teaches nothing. The nada of the early Hemingway is at least clouded in a romantic idealism gone sour. Mailer’s world is a world stripped of hope. The novel as a literary form is about man- sinful, murderous, inhuman, and evil mostly, but man who, in the final analysis seeks
redemption and who desires to endure against all forces his own as well as the outside, natural forces. The failure of these negative novels in portraying real characters stems from this refusal to see a purpose in man's efforts to endure.\textsuperscript{67}

These charges, cloaked in an obvious subjectivity, stem from Mailer's failure to subscribe to the particular form of "protest" which Spicehandler feels is necessary for the validity of a war novel. Yet it is in the very terms of this condemnation that Mailer's particular achievement in The Naked and the Dead may be defined. For Mailer learnt from war something that no earlier war has so clearly taught: the futility of the human condition. War for Mailer, is more than a subject for fiction in itself: it is a concrete representation of human weakness and of the society created by such weakness. If the protest in this novel were limited, as Spicehandler seems to suggest, only to a condemnation of the American social structure, it would be understandable, for Mailer's world is indeed a "world stripped of hope". Within this hopelessness, however, there is a germ of a protest. Mailer's fiction is always even at this point "about man who in the final analysis, seeks redemption and who desires to endure against all forces ...." In The Naked and the Dead redemption is impossible, and even the endurance of such a man as Red Valsen, defined as it is solely on negative terms, must crumble. Mailer saw the plight of the individual of the post-war years primarily in negative terms, but this does not mean that he was willing to give up entirely on man's chances for redemption and to rest on the black vision of The Naked and the Dead as his final statement. Although Mailer has maintained his cynicism in regard to American society he progressed steadily in his writings towards the vision of possible hope for individual salvation.

\textsuperscript{67} Spicehandler, Daniel - The American War Novel (Columbia University, NY, 1960) Page 208
Looking backwards at the First World War novels, The Naked and the Dead seems to offer an instructive example for comparison with the earlier cluster of novels. The first encounter of Hemingway, Dos Passos and Cummings had resulted in initial recoil, translated after aesthetic assimilation into works of considerable artistic merit. Hemingway pared down language and concretised experience formally; Cummings in The Enormous Room eulogised individuals who themselves incarnated regenerative metaphors. The novels of these First World War writers exhibit as a common basis a faith in the potentiality of the hero to perform significant morally affirmative acts. Frederick Henry, John Andrews (Three Soldiers) and Richard Plume (Plumes) are all good men. In Mailer’s novel the reader meets a very different situation and finds it hard to sympathise with any of the characters of the novel. Indeed a plausible case can be advanced that not a single actively good man emerges throughout The Naked and the Dead. None of the characters seems capable of taking the kind of redemptive and positive action that Frederick Henry did in negotiating a separate peace. History had, obviously intervened between the years of the boom and depression, the growth of fascism, Auschwitz, the dropping of the two atomic bombs and the beginning of the cold war with the Soviet Union.

In The Naked and the Dead no significant personal or social affirmation seems possible; marriage and the redemptive power of love, for example, are discredited throughout the novel: many of the major characters have suffered marital discord. Croft has been unfaithful to his wife and she to him; Cummings describes his wife as a “bitch”; Red Valsen has abandoned Lois; Pollack who has been seduced by a woman as a boy regards all women with suspicion, and Hearn desires women merely as sex objects. We have travelled a long way from Frederick Henry’s responsible
attitude towards Catherine Barkley. A series of other striking dissimilarities between Mailer's work and the earlier novels may be observed. A key one is the response displayed by characters towards the enemy: Dos Passos' characters generally show a reverence for the enemy nowhere paralleled in Mailer; even the gentle Martinez prods a dead Japanese and bodies are looted unceremoniously in one of the most graphic portrayals of wartime savagery.

Hemingway's Frederick Henry capitalises upon comradeship as a countervailing force of war, and he finds consolation in the dignity of Count Greffi and in the decency of both Rinaldi and the hotel barman who supplies him with a boat to escape with Catherine to Switzerland. In Hemingway too, the Winchester-on-the-wall tradition of the frontiersmen is in some measure reaffirmed in the self reliant conduct of Frederick Henry and Nick Adams. But in The Naked and the Dead this becomes transmuted through the actions of the murderous Westerner, the Texan Croft, into perverted blood-lust. Earlier heroes, too had found a talismanic power in nature, but Croft once again reverses this tendency by squeezing the throat of a bird with an almost sexual pleasure. In the case of Hearn, the Time Machine plays a crucial role in enabling the reader to understand the origins of his alienation and his descent into nada. Hearn has been shaped irrevocably by his class origins; he cannot establish rapport or forge a liaison with the enlisted men, neither can he stomach the ethics of his own officer class. Such an isolated position confirms his alienation; instead of gaining promotion in the company of officers, he dies in confusion betrayed by enlisted men. Hearn's anxiety is emblematic of the theme of alienation displayed by Second World War writers.
Whereas the drama of the World War I novel derived from the element of shock arising out of the new and horrifying experience of war, the World War II novelists "lack such a point of view for they have not found in war sufficient contrast with the culture in which they grew up." Paradoxically, one result of this situation is that this generation of writers escapes in most instances from the "lost generation" idea despite a lack of feeling that they have seen the end of war. Their style tends to be firm, unemotional and realistic. In this it tends to be different from the mass hysteria characteristic of much World War I literature. The tone of the World War II novelists becomes cynical over the materialistic interpretations of the origins of the war rather than over the emotional shock of misplaced idealism or the horror of mechanised slaughter.

In at least one sense the question of the place of war in human affairs supplies a standard by which the novels of World War II can be divided into two categories. In one category are the works of those novelists - Mailer, and James Jones among who we see the brutality of war as an expression of irrepressible human instinct. These writers subscribe more or less openly to the point of view of Ernest Jones in Essays in Applied Psychology in that their characters "or some of them" are "war lovers" and the implication that war has an importance to human beings other than as a means of national policy.

"Four repressed instincts play a cardinal part in all war: the passions for cruelty, destruction, lust and loot. It is popularly held that the manifestations of these are incidental to war, and not inherent in it; that they are regrettable, though perhaps unavoidable, complications which should be reduced to a minimum. But it is found in practice that where one of these passions is suppressed another flames out the more to take its place; one army may rape where another loots."^69

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^68 Aichinger, Peter - The American Soldier in Fiction (Iowa State University Press, 1975) Page 60
^69 Jones, Ernest - Essays in Applied Psychology (London, 1951) Page 70
In the other category are writers like Irwin Shaw and Herman Wouk who imply through the words and attitudes of their protagonists, that war is an aberration of human conduct and that civilised men are not drawn inexorably to indulge in it. Some of these soldiers, like Croft, either overtly or implicitly find that war precipitates latent killer instinct and offers them the chance to express what is presumably a permanent aspect of human nature. More important, the mood of all these novels is that war had become interminable. In The Naked and the Dead the soldiers look forward only to campaign after campaign until they are all destroyed. As a result the soldiers in these works, instead of having the unified outlook of the characters in the works of those authors who see war as a passing phenomenon, tend to be sharply divided into war lovers and pacifists. Croft’s positive delight in combat contrasts with Martinez’s agonising over the sinfulness of killing. In the novels of World War I the concept of the “war lover” would occasionally crop up; for example, the priest in A Farewell to Arms who identified himself with the peasants and their outlook said:

“"There are people who would make war. In this country there are many like that."

More frequently the source of the war was associated with political or diplomatic issues. The most significant trend among the World War II novelists, which culminated in the novels of the absurd, was to recognise that war was not a passing phenomenon and to make explicit the element of individual responsibility in facing the problem of violence.

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70 Hemingway Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 54
It could be said that the American novelists of World War II attributed a pragmatic and realistic outlook to the fictional soldier. Most of the writers base their novels on the active service they had seen during the war and were better qualified by their experience to treat a broader spectrum of military life than were the earlier group of novelists. But if they did treat such widely diversified aspects of the political and ethical facets of the war and saw the soldier as both combatant and conqueror, the individual author tended to have a narrower outlook than his World War I counterpart. There is some bias towards a "platoon cosmology" with a few principal characters and a "couple of dozen caricatures" especially among those novelists who felt unable to handle the whole scope of the war and yet considered that the action of a single individual would be insignificant. In other words, these authors sought to recreate the melting-pot atmosphere and to express a multiplicity of viewpoints without going beyond the manageable bounds of a platoon or section. Perhaps nowhere is this best illustrated than in Mailer’s novel. The novels of the Second War are more often characterised by a sober belief that if the team performs well and the coach calls the right shots all will be well with humanity.

It is exactly this level-headed realism, coupled with a natural tendency to emphasise the sensational aspects of warfare, that has aroused a considerable body of adverse comments on these novels. As early as 1944 (The Naked and the Dead had not been published) Joseph Remenyi voiced what was to become a general criticism of World War II:

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71 Aichinger, Peter – The American Soldier in Fiction (Iowa, 1975) Page 63
“They are sensational, but often boring; the writers of personal narratives are inclined to be garrulous or champions of ‘thrillers’.”\textsuperscript{72} Malcolm Cowley says that while they are technically more competent than the novels of World War I, they lack any example of outstanding literary merit. “They form a table land, not a chain of mountains.”\textsuperscript{73} Leslie Fiedler observes “all the novels about the Second World War could never convince an intelligent observer from Betelgeusa that such an event had ever occurred; for they clearly represent the reaction of sensitive young men to a conflict they had read about during their high school days”.\textsuperscript{74} John Aldridge complains that “it is as if these novels had been written too easily and their authors had too painless an apprenticeship”.\textsuperscript{75}

Yet in all of these comments one senses a typical desire for either originality of plot or sensational statistics. Since war does not change its fundamental characteristics (although the author’s perception of it might) and since the percentage of casualties in World War II were far lower than in World War I, these critics were bound to be deceived in their expectations. They did not perceive that the balanced outlook of some World War II writers would lead to a new assessment of the place of warfare in society.

Finally there is the well-founded charge, which could probably be leveled at the novelists of any war, that too many novels are restricted to a bald and ultimately boring realism. “This is the way it was, the author says. He was there and cannot be

\textsuperscript{72} Remenyi, Joseph – The Psychology of War Literature (Sewanee Review, Summer 1955, LII) Page 137
\textsuperscript{73} Cowley, Malcolm – War Novels: After two Wars, in Modern American Fiction (ed) A. Walton Litz (Oxford University Press, 1963)
\textsuperscript{74} Fiedler, Leslie – The Ant and the Grasshopper, Partisan Review, XXII, Page 412
\textsuperscript{75} Aldridge, John, W – After the Lost Generation (New York, 1951) Page 81.
contradicted … the urgency to explain the way it really was … can dismiss cause and effect in favour of merely how it happened.”

In many respects this aspect of the war novel is part of the tendency described by Philip Rahv of the American writer to depend too heavily on experience as opposed to psychological interpretation as the basis of his work – a tendency that would naturally be aggravated in a wartime situation where many inexperienced writers would try to capitalise on a body of sensational experience. If one recognises the validity of these comments, it is also necessary to assess the reasons for the relative mediocrity of the World War II novels. William Philips has claimed: “After the thirties writing took to greater realism in style and theme, to smaller subjects, to more recognisable worlds.”

The tendency to seek mundane answers to the nations’ problems was not peculiar to the war novel. In any case if World War II was less disastrous than World War I in terms of American ideals, it was also less capable of dramatisation in intensely personal terms. Early in the war Amy Loveman said:

“The war remains for most of us an amorphous drama, impossible to realise in the agony of the individual, as we realised it in 1914 …”

This was largely because in World War II standardised military procedures had replaced the unorthodox freelance attitudes and roles of men in the Red Cross Ambulance Services of the First War. The eighteen year old Hemingway seizing his moment of Italian heroism is an unforgettable figure, but to Fiedler, Norman Mailer

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78 Philips, Williams – What Happened in the Thirties in Commentary Reader, Norman Podhoretz (ed), Page 762
79 Lovemen, Amy – Then and Now, Saturday Review of Literature, XXVII, 8 August 1940
and James Jones must have been indistinguishable from thousands of other GIs in the Pacific.

Where a collection of highly articulate individuals saw World War I in the comparatively restricted area of Western Europe, American GIs in the Second War fought on every part of the globe. The attention of the reader and the writer was consequently divided from the very beginning. It was almost impossible for one man to have a synoptic view of the war. Furthermore the nature of the war itself, tended to reduce its dramatic value insofar as drama derives from controversy. As Cowley has said, the writers of the Second War do not presume to judge the war precisely because they were able to appreciate its objectives. World War I was a long drawn bloody affair; in World War II, victories were more clear cut, the team rolled forward.

The complexity of the operations of the Second World War also brought home to the new generation of writers, an increasing awareness of the complexity of life in general. Referring to the works of Cummings and Hemingway, Aldridge remarks:

“In each case the emphasis was on the individual rather than the mass, the simple and the concrete rather than the complex and ideological ... What Dos Passos saw in terms of the experience of three men, these writers see in terms of whole armies, whole societies.”

This is the consideration that gave Norman Mailer pause in writing The Naked and the Dead; it is written in the “tone of a man whose capacity for political indignation is inhibited by a very keen sense of the world as a very complicated place”. The cautiousness of the novelist of World War II was part of a growing political maturity.

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81 Aldridge, John W. – After the Lost Generation (New York, 1951) Page 114-115
Ultimately, however, the novelist’s real difficulty in dramatising World War II derived from the effect that World War I had on the popular concepts of duty and heroism.

"The notions of glory, honour and courage lose all meaning when in the West men still nominally Christian, come to believe that the worst thing of all is to die – when for the first time in thousand years, it is possible to admit that no cause is worth dying for." 83

Perhaps in the United States this loss of the sense of the heroic quality of combat was not completely assimilated until the nation had experienced a full-scale commitment to a foreign war, but the novels of World War II illustrate the increasing awareness of the problem. The writers are faced time and again with a fundamental dilemma: the novels that lack a hero or heroic action tend to be mediocre or incohesive, and yet the pattern of heroic action tends to end in meaningless destruction.

The prime significance of World War II novels written by American authors was that they allowed the writers to work out the conflict between native pragmatism and the heroic tradition. In this sense they represent the basis for the movement toward the absurd that occurred later in the decade.